

3 March 1978

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
NATIONAL FOREIGN ASSESSMENT CENTER

MEMORANDUM

TERRORIST ATTACKS AGAINST INTERNATIONALLY
PROTECTED PERSONS

This memorandum summarizes basic conclusions which can be derived from unclassified data regarding terrorist activity directed against US and foreign diplomatic installations and officials during the past decade. The accompanying tables present detailed information on the incidents upon which these conclusions are based. Interpretation of the statistics should be based upon the appended codebook and explanation of the limitations of the data.*

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Between 1968 and 1977, 234 acts of terrorism were directed against US diplomatic installations and individuals abroad. Incendiary and explosive bombings were by far the most popular tactics in the terrorists' repertoire, accounting for 62 and 88 incidents, respectively. A peak in activity occurred in 1970 and 1971, when more than 50 incidents were reported each year. While these figures fell off significantly in the following years, there was an increase in the numbers of attacks reported in 1977. (See Figure 1.)

** This discussion is confined to attacks aimed solely at diplomats or diplomatic installations. It does not include incidents involving military or other official representatives of the foreign government.*

This memorandum was prepared by the Office of Regional and Political Analysis, International Issues Division. Questions and comments may be addressed to

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Latin America was the scene of the most attacks on American diplomatic establishments (80 incidents), followed by Western Europe (54 incidents), and the Middle East (50 incidents). (See Figure 2. Characteristics of each of these 234 incidents can be found in Figure 3.)

In the eight cases in which American diplomats were reported to be victims of hostage incidents, terrorist demands included the release of prisoners, safe passage from the scene, publication of manifestos, and other non-logistic demands. Sixty-one prisoners were released from foreign prisons in response to these incidents. (See Figure 5.)

During the past decade, foreign diplomatic installations and individuals were targeted in 497 cases. (See Figure 4.) Foreign diplomats were taken hostage in 33 incidents. Terrorist demands paralleled those made in the cases of American victimization, but also included specific political changes to be made by a foreign government. (See Figure 6.)

Legal actions taken against offenders have varied, depending upon the governments involved and the specifics of the case. In all but 12 of the incidents of attacks on American diplomats, we have no information indicating that any arrests were made. In these 12 cases, a total of 61 individuals were incarcerated. We have information on 48 cases of attacks against foreign diplomatic facilities, indicating that 164 individuals were arrested. The ultimate disposition of the cases of these suspects has varied according to circumstances of the incident. (See Figures 7 and 8. The reader is warned, however that the disposition of offenders is poorly reported in open sources. A comprehensive study of governmental responses to these incidents would probably give a far different picture of the extent of prosecutions.)

A Note on Interpretation of Statistics

While compilations of data on terrorism can serve as a useful analytical tool in suggesting trends and probabilities based upon historical experience, as well as retrieving information on specific incidents, one must be aware of the assumptions and limitations involved.

To qualify for inclusion into the system, the terrorist incident must have involved the use or attempted use of violence for political purposes when (1) such action was intended to influence the attitude and behavior of a target group wider than the immediate victims, and (2) its ramifications transcended national boundaries (as a result, for example, of the nationality or foreign ties of its perpetrators, its locale, the identity of its institutional or human victims, its declared objectives, or the mechanics of its resolution). Thus, the statistics exclude terrorist attacks on US and allied personnel and installations in Indo-china. They also exclude most of the mutual assassination efforts and cross-border operations associated with the Arab-Israeli conflict; the only exceptions are incidents that either victimized noncombatant nationals of states outside the principal arena of conflict or were of such a nature that they became the object of international controversy. Figures also exclude bombing, shelling, and incursions by conventional forces. Related but separately targeted actions undertaken by a single terrorist group were counted as individual incidents, even when they were staged on the same day and in close proximity to one another. Terrorist operations that aborted during execution (as opposed to those that were abandoned or countered during the planning or staging phases) were counted.

There are many significant gaps in our knowledge about specific incidents and groups--and even those terrorist organizations and actions on which there is considerable reliable information do not always fit nearly into the typologies that have been created for them. Moreover, the number of incidents under review is so small that unintended omissions (of which there are undoubtedly many) or erroneous classification of borderline events could have a statistically significant impact. In many cases in which the perpetrator is unknown, attribution to terrorists may be misleading. The action may have been undertaken by criminals, psychotics, or revenge-seeking individuals with specific nonpolitical grievances against the target, rather than by terrorists.

The statistics are based solely on unclassified material published from 1968 through 1977. There is no way of telling how much of the sharp rise in recorded terrorist incidents over the past decade reflects a real increase in such activity and how much is attributable to more comprehensive and systematic reporting by the press. On the other hand, many incidents have probably not been reported. For example, corporations appear to be wary of reporting threats or attacks against them, for reasons of increased insurance, governmental sanctions against the payment of ransom, disagreement with governmental authorities regarding how to handle the incident, and potential loss of public and investor confidence. Official compilations are subject to other reportorial inhibitions.

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Approved For Release 2004/08/30 : CIA-RDP81M00980R001600040015-5

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Approved For Release 2004/08/30 : CIA-RDP81M00980R001600040015-5



CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Office of Legislative Counsel
Washington, D. C. 20505

Telephone: [redacted]

7 March 1978

OIC 78-0847 STAT

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TO: Mr. Joseph DiGiorgio
International Division
General Accounting Office
441 G Street N. W., Rm. 4824
Washington, D. C. 20548

Dear Mr. DiGiorgio:

Attached is some further information from [redacted] as we discussed at our meeting. I hope you will find it helpful.



Office of Legislative Counsel

Encl.

FORM 1533 OBSOLETE
6-68 PREVIOUS EDITIONS

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Enclosure is a computer listing of terrorist incidents that happened throughout the world.

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